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WASHINGTON TALK

Briefing

G. Washington, Spy

It may be stretching things a bit to say that George Washington was the father of the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. But a letter now in the Forbes Magazine Galleries in New York City shows that the man who later became the first President had some ideas on running covert operations in the Revolutionary War.

Facsimiles of that original letter were presented in the capital this week by Malcolm Forbes to William J. Casey, Director of Central Intelligence, and William Webster, Director of the F.B.I. Mr. Forbes said he was not sure how useful General Washington's suggestions on covert operations might be today, but he thought the two men might find them intriguing.

The letter, dated Sept. 24, 1779, was sent to a Major Tallmadge. In it, General Washington vetoed the idea that one of this country's informers, Culper Junr, quit his regular job so as to devote himself solely to undercover work. While not mentioning what line of work Culper Junr was in, Washington wrote: "I would imagine that with a little industry he will be able to carry on his intelligence with greater security to himself, and greater advantages to us, under cover of his usual business."

As for suggestions on how to transmit such intelligence, Washington proposed that Culper Junr write his data on the blank leaves of pamphlets or books and send them to the proper authorities "without risque of search or the scrutiny of the enemy, as this is chiefly directed against paper made up in the form of letters."